

done about wrapping hardware round these ideas, and no one can offer more than the vaguest guess about how to do it.

This last fact is usually bypassed with a lot of hand-waving and an appeal to the example of Nature. It must be possible to build a self-replicating system, mustn't it? Because DNA-living things do it already? Well yes, it's true that it must be possible. But "possible" says nothing at all about how easy or how difficult it is, and, though the potential of (controllable) artificial life is as near infinite as makes no difference, it remains only potential, till someone actually builds some.

What has been done (and what Levy does describe rather well) is research into what might be called Virtual Life. This means the creation of things like Lem's "personids," but very much simpler, inside computers. Another brief explanation here: in cyberspace, replicators can be very simple, lacking the elaborate machinery needed in real-space to capture energy and build material structures. To put a rough figure on it, "cyber-life" entities may be made up of less than 1000 bits of information, while in contrast the simplest real-world Von Neumann machines (bacteria) have around 109 parts. Computer "life" shows little behavioural sophistication, but it can be used to investigate evolutionary, bio-social and even mathematical puzzles, and the experiments Levy reports in this area really are quite fascinating.

This bit of the book is good. But I'm afraid that what Levy really wants to write about is something dangerous and dramatic: tides of grey goo overwhelming the biosphere, silicon life succeeding carbon life, people downloading their brains into computers, stuff like that. There's nothing outside fantasy that can really offer these delicious threats, but, willy-nilly, that's the conclusion he imposes on his book. Which is a pity.

In truth, research into artificial life is at the same stage that research into artificial intelligence was in the 1960s. Which is to say, we are so ignorant of the real tasks that we are only just beginning to appreciate how difficult they are, and some people are still making the most ludicrously inflated claims.

(Andy Robertson)

UK Books Received December 1992

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers

rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Aaronovitch, Ben. **Transit**. "The New Doctor Who Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20384-4, 264pp, paperback, £3.99. (Shared-universe sf novel, first edition.) *December 1992?*

Barker, Clive. **The Yattering and Jack**. Adapted by Steve Niles and Fred Burke. Illustrated by John Bolton and Hector Gomez. HarperCollins/Eclipse, ISBN 0-586-21750-9, unpaginated, trade paperback, £6.99. (Horror graphic novel, first edition.) *25th January 1993.*

Billson, Anne. **Suckers**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-32806-9, 315p, paperback, £4.99. (Humorous vampire novel, first edition; one of seven paperback novels to be featured by W.H. Smith in a "Fresh Talent" promotion; the British author is known as a film critic, and has previously written the movie novelization *Dream Demon*.) *20th January 1993.*

Cadnum, Michael. **Saint Peter's Wolf**. Arrow, ISBN 0-09-918991-7, 344pp, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1991.) *December 1992.*

Charrette, Robert N. **Never Trust an Elf: Shadowrun 6**. Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-017543-1, 278pp, paperback, £4.99. (Shared-world fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1992.) *7th January 1993.*

Coppola, Francis Ford, and James V. Hart. **Bram Stoker's Dracula: The Film and the Legend**. Afterword by Leonard Wolf. Pan, ISBN 0-330-32858-1, 172pp, trade paperback, £7.99. (Horror-film screenplay, with illustrations and secondary material; first published in the USA, 1992.) *4th December 1992.*

Dickson, Gordon R. **The Dragon Knight**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21327-9, 503pp, paperback, £5.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; sequel to *The Dragon and the George*; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 50.) *3rd December 1992.*

Donnelly, Joe. **Still Life**. Century, ISBN 0-7126-5381-3, 554pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Horror novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) *21st January 1993.*

Eddings, David. **The Losers**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21759-2, 298pp, paperback, £4.99. (Non-fantasy novel by a leading fantasist, first published in the USA, 1992.) *11th January 1993.*

Eurudice. **f/32: The Second Coming**. Virago, ISBN 1-85381-551-9, 187pp, paperback, £5.99. (Feminist/pornographic fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; about a woman's genitalia which seem to take on a life of their own [yet more co-option of William Burroughs-like material by a female writer?], this strange book is decorated with commendations from Kathy Acker and Robert Coover; the author, we are told, "was born on the island of Lesbos, Greece"; this first UK edition is revised.) *18th February 1993.*

Feist, Raymond E. **Magician**. "New Revised Edition." Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21343-0, 681pp, trade paperback, £9.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1982; Feist's debut book, this new edition is 15,000 words longer than the original.) *3rd December 1992.*

Fowler, Christopher. **Darkest Day**. Little, Brown, ISBN 0-316-90534-8, 570pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Horror novel, first edition; proof copy received.) *22nd April 1993.*

Grafton, John. **Great Ghost Stories**. "Dover

Thrift Editions." Dover/Constable, ISBN 0-486-27270-2, vi+100pp, trade paperback, £0.95. (Ghost-story anthology, first published in the USA, 1992; it contains ten fairly well-known tales by Benson, Bierce, Dickens, Jacobs, James, Le Fanu, Stoker, etc; this is the U.S. edition with a British price sticker.) *31st December 1992.*

Holt, Tom. **Overtime**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-039-6, 243pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition.) *28th January 1993.*

Holt, Tom. **Ye Gods!** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-080-9, 296pp, paperback, £4.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1992.) *28th January 1993.*

Keith, William H., Jr. **Decision at Thunder Rift**. "Battletech." Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-017549-0, 325pp, paperback, £4.99. (Shared-world sf novel, first published in the USA, 1992.) *7th January 1993.*

Klyve, Gregory, and Chris Oakley. **The Legend of Perseus**. Byronic Books [15 Pixies Hill Cres., Hemel Hempstead, Herts. HP1 2BU], ISBN 0-9514571-0-1, 192pp, £3.50. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1989.) *No date shown; received by us in December 1992.*

Lindsey, David L. **Body of Truth**. Little, Brown, ISBN 0-356-20795-1, 417pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in the USA, 1992; oddly, this hardcover seems to follow a trade-paperback edition which Little, Brown published last July [see listing in *Interzone* 64] – unless the publishers have sent us the books in the wrong order.) *25th March 1993.*

Lumley, Brian. **Fruiting Bodies and Other Fungi**. Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-017302-1, 278pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror collection, first edition [?].) *7th January 1993.*

Lumley, Brian. **In the Moons of Borea**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21467-4, 252pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf/horror novel, first published in the USA, 1979; a "Cthulhu Mythos" novel.) *11th January 1993.*

McCaffrey, Anne. **Dragonflight**. Adapted by Brynne Stephens. Illustrated by Lela Dowling, Cynthia Martin and Fred Von Tobel. HarperCollins/Eclipse, ISBN 0-586-21752-5, unpaginated, trade paperback, £7.99. (Sf graphic novel, first edition.) *25th January 1993.*

Maddox, Tom. **Halo**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-965400-8, 216pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 55.) *December 1992.*

Marshak, Sondra, and Myrna Culbreath, eds. **Star Trek: The New Voyages 2**. Titan, ISBN 1-85286-453-2, 252pp, paperback, £3.99. (Shared-universe sf anthology, first published in the USA, 1977 [?]; the contributors all appear to be members of "Star Trek" fandom.) *26th January 1993.*

Masterton, Graham. **The Hymn**. Warner, ISBN 0-7515-0057-7, 346pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA [?], 1991.) *28th January 1993.*

Mitchell, Mike, ed. **The Dedalus/Ariadne Book of Austrian Fantasy: The Meyrink Years, 1890-1930**. Dedalus, ISBN 0-946626-93-6, 416pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Fantasy/horror anthology, first edition; among the authors represented, most of them newly translated by the editor, are Arthur Schnitzler, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Franz Werfel, Alfred Kubin, Rainer Maria Rilke, Leo Perutz, Franz Kafka, Max Brod and, of course, Gustav Meyrink; an interesting book, dealing with a rich period of European fantasy which is too little known to present-day English-language readers – despite the fact that this Austro-

opinions should perhaps be taken in the spirit with which they were published, in an issue celebratory of Bob's many contributions to science fiction and sf fandom (in this sense, yes, most of the material in the Shaw issue was published because of "the name of the author"). Brian Aldiss's story, on the other hand, was published in no special context and has to stand or fall on its own merits. It has provoked a good deal of controversy, and the nature of its reception raises matters of importance to this magazine. We did not publish Aldiss's "Horse Meat" lightly (as we did Bob Shaw's non-fiction piece); for we too had found it upsetting. However, we were also impressed by the intense quality of the writing: it seemed a literary fever-dream which carried it own ghastly conviction. We pondered the story; several of us read it; one of our senior Advisory Editors was consulted. No one recommended rejection, and we decided to publish.

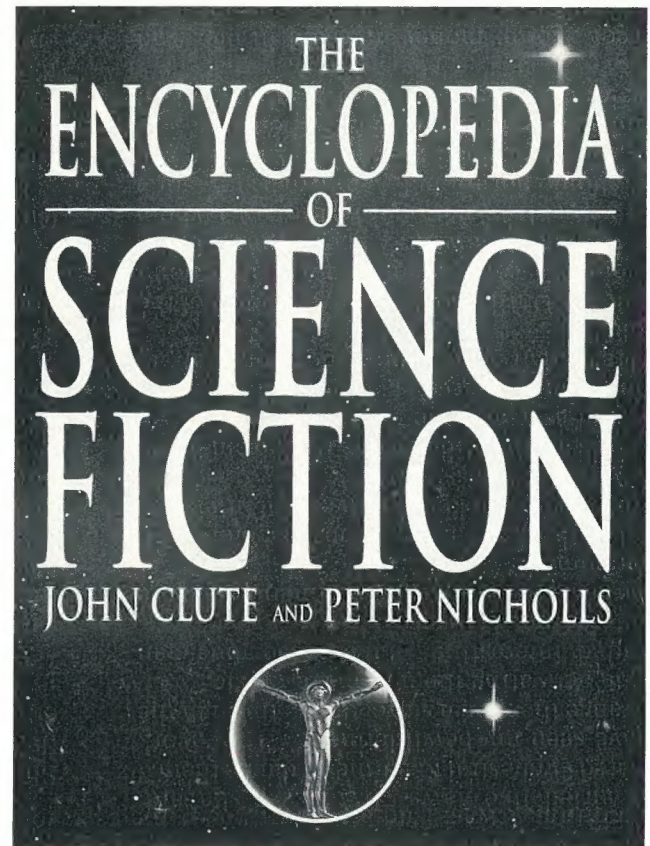
Some readers have praised the Aldiss story (and indeed voted for it in our readers' poll – see results in the next issue) but others, a vocal majority of the letter-writers, have complained bitterly. These people have had their say. Now, what we need to know from them (and from others) is just where the limits should be drawn with such "dangerous" material. Do readers not wish to be challenged, provoked, even upset or offended, by at least some of the stories we publish in these pages? Must everything we print be regarded first and foremost as entertainment? We have always considered sf to be something more than "mere entertainment," which is why we are producing a magazine devoted to the form. As I've said before, we hope to fill *Interzone* with a variety of stories covering the whole range of intelligent sf and fantasy – from light tales through stories of ideas, upbeat, downbeat, moving and thought-provoking fiction, to (occasionally) the profoundly disturbing. At this late stage, I'm not soliciting "defences" of the Aldiss story in particular, but do please write in and tell us if you think our overall policy is right or wrong. And tell us where you think the limits of decorum should lie.

Dear Editors:

In issue 67 Bob Shaw advises sf writers that the appropriate choice of names can go a long way towards suspending the reader's disbelief.

I was born on the planet Billinge, less than a parsec's distance from Golborne's muddy wastes. Could you ask Mr Shaw by what paranormal means he chose these two places – both far-flung outposts of the Galactic Empire of Wigan – to invest "Alien Porn" with such an incredible credibility?

Bill Lythgoe
Wigan



Win an SF Encyclopedia!

Competition time. We don't often run competitions in these pages, but the publishers Little, Brown have kindly offered us as enticement a copy of the massive new edition of **The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction** edited by John Clute and Peter Nicholls. They're offering just one prize copy, mark you, and if you want to win it you're going to have to work hard. Read on.

This new Clute/Nicholls tome, out in late April 1993, is a vast rewrite and expansion of the first edition (1979) and is well over a million words long – the essential one-volume reference book for the science-fiction field. I've had little involvement with its preparation myself, other than to revise and expand my entry therein on **J.G. Ballard**. Which set me to thinking...

Back in the late 1970s, Jim Ballard was offered the job of novelizing Ridley Scott's forthcoming sf movie *Alien*. In a letter to me (dated 26th February 1984) confirming the truth of this unlikely rumour, he stated: "They offered me \$20,000 but it was surprisingly easy to turn down." He added: "I wouldn't mind doing the novelization of *Alphaville*, or even Huston's *Moby Dick* or Hawks's *Big Sleep* (Welles's *Macbeth* would pose some problems)." Revelatory stuff! As we all know, the *Alien* assignment went to Alan Dean Foster instead. So what I propose for a readers' competition is this:

Let us pretend that this is an alternative time line in which J.G. Ballard did accept the commission to write the novelization of *Alien*. Please send us your best two or three paragraphs of *Alien*-as-written-by-Ballard. The most convincing entry will be published here in *Interzone* and its author will receive a free copy of the Clute/Nicholls *Encyclopedia of SF*. Deadline: 1st May 1993. Happy writing!

(Ideas for future competitions: *The Sheik* as novelized by James Joyce; *Citizen Kane* as by Virginia Woolf; *Casablanca* as by Ernest Hemingway; *It's a Wonderful Life* as by Henry Miller; *Barbarella* as by Angela Carter; *RoboCop* as by Salman Rushdie; hmm... the brain bubbles.)

(David Pringle)